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Study of the coordination and effectiveness of the inter-professional consulting systems for immigrants' educational inclusion in Andalusian Schools

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Abstract

The present article summarizes the theoretical approach, the methodology's, research, data times' collection and the first evidence/findings which have been developed within the Project "Study of coordination and effectiveness of inter-professional advice system, for the educational inclusion of immigrants' children in Andalusian schools" financed by the Ministry of Economy, Innovation and Science of Andalusia Commitment and European FEDER funds.

Keywords: coordination, immigration, inter-professional, education.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Andalusian schools have become areas of multicultural convergence where a large number of immigrants' children, from very different geographical and cultural origin, has been integrated into school life with greater or smaller success in academics, in socio-scholastic processes, in their relationships with other pupils, with teachers, etc. The Andalusian educational Administration, to favour and foster this process of the immigrant pupils' inclusion, has been promoting over the recent years material, policy and human resources with people performing these tasks inside educational centres. So today we find that, in our schools, as well as teachers, other professional people, such as center or equipment counselors, intercultural mediators, ATAL and support's teachers, etc. work and collaborate in this task. And along with them, there are performances and special training programs and specific or general advice provided by the Andalusian CEP network. In spite of this backlog of tasks, functions and specialists, to be able to multiply their action ability, they need flowing professional coordination systems in communication, confluent in ontological and resolute in action. The investigation about the ways of such coordination and its effectiveness are the study object of this project. Effectiveness we mean in two dimensions: first as a capacity to influence and support teachers in their educational task directly as a central element of the teaching / learning relation; secondly, as testable results in the improvement of care systems and inclusion of children and adolescents.

2. Project objectives

1. To examine the institutional plans of action with the immigrants' pupils and the underlying pedagogical models.

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2. To analyze the process of permanent training of various professionals (teachers, counselors, mediators, PT, etc.) on the subject of immigration and the impact of their practices.
3. To investigate the professional thinking, the functions and the processes of internal coordination of the various professionals involved, directly or indirectly in the formation of immigrant students in schools.
4. To know the perception that immigrant students have about their reality (personal and academic) at the centers, and the impact that the action of the various professionals has on them.
5. To propose strategies for effective and efficient coordination between different professionals to promote an inclusive school.

3. Metodology and Work plan

-1st phase: documentary analysis and sample study'. We had conducted an analysis of the institutional advice-oriented plans to work with immigrant students and we had also prepared opinion questionnaires about permanent education received by different professionals: teachers, counselors, advisers and mediators.

-2nd phase: Pedagogical inquiry through Case Studies. This phase is the most important in terms of approach to reality and knowledge of goals 2, 3 and 4. For its development 4 case studies will be held, together with a discussion group with a representation of the different sectors involved: teachers, counselors, mediators and counselors of the CEP, and with it, we intend not only to gather more information but "triangular" the same, knowing the opinions about inter-professional coordination and advice on immigration, effectiveness in the practices developed in schools and 3 stories of life or single case studies.

-3rd phase: Contextualized proposal de re-orientation which would take place in two stages: the first one with proposals' elaboration and the second one, putting them into practice, as far as possible, in the centers where case studies are tested.

-4th phase: contrast, evaluation and diffusion.

4. Early analysis of research

In the following sections we refer to global aspects, which are emerging in the research and which are interesting topics for further investigations.

4.1. Professional dissemination in schools

Never as today, the inter-professional coordination inside schools has been so much important. We live in a society characterized by what Bauman (2003) defines "liquid modernity", because of fluid and interchangeable relations, imprecise and every time less clear institutional limits. A world where people circulate through multiple scenarios and are moulded by many different social agents. In this changing and versatile context, it is easy to agree with the idea that coordination has to become a requirement so difficult in its management and structure, as necessary to promote and improve educational processes. However, schools organizations have gained throughout their history the reputation of being resistant to coordination, in a way that if coordination is, as we have been assuming, the essential feature of a strong and effective organization in today's society, without it we cannot speak of a school as a strong organization entity that seeks standards of educational quality (Pérez Gómez, 1998). Although behind this criticism to the coordination dynamics inside the centres there could be a speech about teaching individualism, we do not share this idea. We must consider the fact that this situation has been reached in a more complex way, with variable multiples and that the problem's root is in what San Fabian Maroto (2008) calls "institutional inertia". This inertia, installed in school organizations, characterized by a structural imbalance, formal regulation and ambiguity in the technical, causes a parallel functioning between formal organs' involvement and the reluctant teaching, at the beginning, to the professional cooperation (San Fabian Maroto, 2008). Therefore, as we have been saying, teaching coordination is necessary both because we live in a changing society and because it is the only way to work, inside school's centres. In an innovative and holistic way with all students. The fundamental challenge to be faced by schools is, institutes and professional people working in them, in today's society, taking into account the fact that they have to formally organize themselves following a model, which is based on the

participation and the democratic cooperation of their members, to coordinate the actions of the different professionals in order to achieve quality approaches. However, it is not always easy to reach cooperation. As we have analyzed at this point of the study, it is very common that the educational team of a centre and/or classroom does not have a professional and fluid relationship and a common and consensual educational projection of students' training. Thus, we observe as the coordination is lost in the balkanization of different professionals performances, where in an isolated and independent way they develop their performances without communication. In the same way, we must point out that coordination meeting of educational team are legislatively summoned monthly and during the same, as a counsellor told us, pretty always they finish to talk about very superficial things, leaving relevant problems for little committee, thus causing a lack of group communication.

4.2 Coordination as fictional and artificial conceptions

If someone asks in which way it is possible to add individual efforts to achieve collective object, it is immediately clear the need of having a fluid and effective communication. In addition, the centres growth has meant an increase in the complexity of their management; the organizational structure has increased; the functional units have increased; and also positions of leadership and coordination have been expanded. The relationship network has become complicated, which gives even more importance to the spaces and period of times reserved to communication between different people in their various fields of professional relationship, such as departments, groups of training technical teams of pedagogical coordination, etc., to discuss, redefine, analyse and reconstruct their pedagogical approaches and the educational system's ones, as well as their functions as professionals of today's society education (Besalú, 2002). But why although there are formal and institutionalized mechanism of coordination inside educational centres, professionals working in them do not meet to reflect, analyze and suggest improvements to their professional performances? We understand that they have been socialized in a concept of coordination as culture (Armengol, 2002), based on an ideology of fictional, artificial and "bureaucratized" cooperation (Hargreaves, 1996). An ideology based on the simple "this is good and must be done". The administration favoured this perception of coordination to spread organizational and working changes into the centres, creating formal and structured coordinating bodies, running the risk, on one side, of being conceived as control spaces for the educational action with extensive bureaucracy and, on the other side, to impose a kind of professional relationship, favouring a simulated cooperation, losing the opportunity to establish real changes in the conception of coordination as a powerful tool to rebuild and to redefine the educational action in favour of a quality and holistic education.

4.3 The bureaucratization of functions

At this point, it is worth identifying some variables favouring the resistance against coordination, showed by some professionals.; San Fabian Maroto (2008) distinguishes the following: bureaucracy; previous coordination experiences, which were failures most of the times; overload of work; loss of autonomy, both individual and collective; tradition; lack of confidence; personal perceptions; and informal networks. For the importance emerged in our research, we are going to deepen the first variable, that is to say: bureaucratization. In general, we mean that bureaucratization and control promoted by administration, generate a greater isolation of teachers' work and diminish and devalue professional interactions; in the same way, we have perceived that coordination is oriented towards an external control of teachers' work, eliminating conflicts and diluting responsibilities. It is necessary to point out two human groups that can favour the bureaucratization (procedures) or, on the contrary, the promotion of a culture of cooperation and debate, and that, for its importance in professional hierarchy, can become activators or inhibitors: inspection and managing teams. With regards to the former, we do not have relevant data beyond informal talks yet; but concerning the latter, the managing teams' functions, as we have seen, tend to be aiming more to the external representation of the Centre (search of resources, institutional representation, administrative oversight, relations with actors in the environment, etc.) and encouraging the bureaucracy, than towards internal dynamics of the same, as managers and facilitators of a professionals' team.

4.4 Feeling of belonging to a common project

Another aspect, we have analyzed about the inhibition in interdisciplinary coordination's processes would have to do with the sense of professionals' belonging in the construction of a common project. Therefore, it is important that the educational institution takes into consideration also the needs of recognition, self-realization, personal development, etc. of teachers, so that they feel active part on a team and could open to a proposal of participation in a group and common work. The professor, who feels isolated and not recognized professionally, socially and institutionally, hardly seeks professional support and pedagogical debate with colleagues and will not work in a coordinate way, thus promoting a decontextualized work. Beyond the organizational context and from a psychological perspective of the subject, teachers' cooperation and intellectual dialectic also have an internal and personal dimension, requires efforts, involvement, ability for dialogue, partial resignations to individual styles, routines, etc., so it should be done in psychological security context, being sure that cooperation will not oblige either to lose one's identity or the overall sense of competence. Working in a team should not be understood as a threat but as a professional growth within the frame of one's work and the educational institutions. Teaching function requires a high degree of dedication and commitment, scarcely recognized in our mercantile society which rewards more immediate results. "A priori", we note that the teachers, of educational establishments in which we are working, do not feel comfortable in team dynamics and, even if they have attempts to coordinated works, these fears and this lack of thrust prevent the development of a professional culture of cooperation.

4.5 Coordination to support immigrant students: three limit aspects

If interdisciplinary coordination is needed in any educational context, talking about immigrant students and taking into account the number of professionals surrounding it, it becomes even more important, as it is required teamwork and coordination being the migration phenomenon a multi-dimensional one. We cannot deal with diversity without teamwork, because we would work without dealing with human complexity and we would only deal with a part of the students, losing its holistic perspective.. When teachers work cooperating and establish professional connections among themselves, information flow is improved and, if it is beneficial that two parents agree the way of educating their children, it will be extremely important that the educational team of a centre works in a coordinated manner and allows information flow towards a comprehensive education of immigrant students. Coordinating and pooling knowledge, problems and difficulties to be faced by these students, it will be easier to detect situations and provide the most suitable and beneficial answers. As we have already stated in other researches (Fernández Sierra, J., coord,2003,2006), beyond socio-cultural considerations, which in our opinion are relevant for the immigrant students' inclusion, in a purely academic argument, the immigrant students usually access to school with a certain academic disadvantage either for ignorance of the language and of the educational system, or the cultural characteristics of the entering society; and it will be extremely important that the professionals working with them give a suitable and sole answer and have the same goal, which is their holistic education: thus the need of coordination. And to ensure the right to compulsory education of these students requires coordinated actions among all educational actors to provide the most suitable educational answer for the these students. However, we met three main aspects at the basis of the research and which are not only related to the coordination process but also with a divergent view from professionals, of a quality work, related with a holistic and educative vision of what has to be the training of these students: the legislative ambivalence, the construction of a real, common and agreed educational project, and the intercultural training of professionals. On one hand, the legislation enacted in recent years in terms of attention and to diversity and inclusion of immigrant students is at the same time very broad and little concrete; so that, at the same time, it presents measures of inclusion and exclusion, which has generated ambivalent situations in educational centres, where different professionals, very often, are carrying out practices, contradictory from an ontological perspective. On the other hand, the apparent lack of an educational common model in the Centre, guiding teaching performances specifically on these issues, may be one of the reasons of this inertia of the teaching staff, as well as the socialized idea that "things are as well and I just cannot change them". It is of vital importance, for the sake of improving students' training in general and of immigrants in particular, to go towards a conceptual change, not only pedagogical, but also democratic and collaborative work as professional

culture. Finally, the lack of educational commitment which seems to have some professionals in the intercultural field, beyond the great formative deployment included by CEPs, through training projects, is one of the aspects we are currently investigating. In this regard, it is necessary to wonder which kind of training has been provided and which kind of training is requested, analyzing the misalignment or contradictions.

External agents VS internal agents: a different look to coordination importance

Administration has made a great formal effort providing to school centres with a large number of professionals whose functions are directly and completely related to the attention of immigrant students attending schools. Thus, there are ATAL teachers in almost all schools; intercultural mediators on behalf of Delegation of Education entering the centres to assist the development of co-existence habits and to help alleviate, as far as possible, the intercultural clash; in the Delegation of Education of Almería and Huelva, there are a group of people aimed at the organization of attention measures to diversity and especially focused on immigrant students; there are working groups under the CEP to promote multiculturalism in their own schools ;etc.

But do these professional work together or are isolated, working independently without ultimately change the reality of immigrant students because of collaboration lack? Which is the reality of schools and IES from the perspective of the people who act there? Beyond the Balkanization of different professionals functions, we have observed the coordination processes inside school's centres with external agents, we have been talking about, are interpreted in different, even antagonist way, depending on the professionals we talk about; thus, teachers' vision – axis of traditional teaching- in coordination with other ones, and professionals as mediators or social educators – who do not directly act in classroom is quite different. On one hand, the lack of coordination with external agents and professionals, even with the internal psycho pedagogues of the orienting department, is perceived inside schools as something not representing a problem for his teaching work. Some teachers see as normal that these agents, because of 'hours' incompatibility and dedication in different centres, do not coordinate with the teaching board. A fairly widespread idea is that the external agent is coordinated with one or two professionals in the Centre and that it is these people's task to spread information within the board. In addition, the external agent is not seen as a partner participating in the teaching action and seeking the best of this process inside the classroom, but as an expert outside the teaching work in the class and traditionally assigned to teachers. On the contrary, the external agents complain about the lack of coordination with the teachers involved in the educative action and reflect over the weak importance that some internal professionals seem to give to the collaboration with other non-formal educational institutions. Although we cannot generalize, some external agents such as mediators air the idea that there is little collaboration and little information between teachers and them, and they are acting out of a joint educational project. Finally, we leave open some of the questions assailing us at this point of the research. Why there are not coordination processes or the existing ones are so limited? How is inspection involved? Which pedagogical thoughts are there behind these practices? How do psycho-pedagogues dinamize or inhibit coordination? Which is the real intention of working with immigrants' students?

Why does school as space and as institution does not consider important to open and work in a global way while the external educational agents consider essential these actions? Will the reality of educational institutions be incompatible with the external collaboration? These agents will be given less importance against what has traditionally been considered the central axis of education?

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